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THE VEDABBHA JĀTAKA

TRANSLATED FROM THE PALI AND COMPARED WITH

"The Pardoner's Tale"

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

H. T. FRANCIS, M.A.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Buddhist Birth Story, which is here translated, it is believed, for the first time, will be easily recognised as an old friend with a new face; and not only those readers who are curious in folk-lore, but all students of English literature, will be interested in discovering an Indian original for one of the *Canterbury Tales*.[1] By what steps this fable reached Europe—whether it pursued the high road of communication established between Eastern and Western civilisation by the Crusades, or followed in the track of some Mongolian invader, or (it may be) found its way through the Arab conquerors of Spain—is beyond the scope of our present purpose. In the Introduction to the translation of Jātaka Tales by Mr. Rhys Davids, we may learn, as a remarkable illustration of this migration of fables, how the founder of the Buddhist religion, whose legendary history is related in the *Lalita Vistara*, is transformed into the hero of a religious novel by Joannes Damascenus, and under the name of Josaphat[2] is eventu-

[1] I have since heard that Dr. Morris had already identified this story.

[2] For the conversion of the Bodhisat into Josaphat see also the "Migration of Fables" in *Chips from a German Workshop*, Vol. IV.

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ally canonised and enrolled for all time in the order of Roman saints. Some on the other hand have maintained that they can trace the influence of Christian tradition in the *Lalita Vistara* itself, in its present form, and it is at times difficult to believe in reading it that we have not before us a Sanskrit version of some Apocryphal gospel. To return, however, to our subject, the *Vedabbha Jātaka* appears to be composed of two distinct stories: the creation of a treasure by a magic rain from heaven, no uncommon incident in Oriental fable, and the quarrel of the robbers over the treasure-trove. Now a reference to one of the Chaucer Society publications—called *Originals and Analogues of some of the Canterbury Tales*, by Mr. Furnivall—will shew us that there are known to be three earlier versions of this story, from which Chaucer may have drawn his *Pardoner's Tale*, two of them Italian and one Latin. The story is in each case essentially the same, though, as might be expected, there is considerable variety of detail. The moral is prominently brought forward in all the versions. Chaucer, for instance, in his prologue to the tale writes:

> "My theme is alwey oon, and ever was—
> Radix malorum est Cupiditas."

Almost the same words occur in the Latin version, and it would seem as if the devil could quote scripture in Pali as well as in other languages, for in the Buddhist story the robber who remains behind to guard the treasure says to himself, "Verily covetousness is the root of destruction,"

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and immediately after the utterance of this moral sentiment, he conceives the project of murdering his fellow! Truly a veritable Oriental Pecksniff!

The first of the Italian versions, which appears in a collection of stories called *Cento Novelle Antiche*, published in 1525 and supposed to be of higher antiquity than Boccaccio, presents one or two features of some interest. The teacher, Buddha, is here transformed into the Christ, and the story then naturally takes the shape of a gospel parable, and in its treatment somewhat suggests the form of the parable of the Barren Fig-tree. For the fable is not merely told, but, as it were, almost acted before the very eyes of the disciples. When they ask leave to appropriate the money which they had found, they are forbidden by our Lord to do so, and are warned to wait and see the issue. By and bye, on their return, the moral is effectually pointed by the sight of the two dead robbers. In the second of the Italian versions, found in a later edition of the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, it is a hermit that discovers the treasure, and "Covetousness the root of destruction" is personified by a figure of Death which the hermit feigns to believe to be pursuing him; and it is worthy of note that the ruin or death, which in the Pali is a mere metaphor, in the Italian assumes a concrete form. It may be added that the robbers are here three instead of two. In the Latin version of the story taken from the *Novellae* of Morlinus, one or two points of closer agreement with the Pali Jātaka are to be noted. The

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treasure has been discovered by a magic charm, "Magus magico susurro in Tiberi delitere thesaurum cognovit." Moreover, the robbers are no longer two or three but a band, which divides into two parties.

With these preliminary observations, I proceed to give the translation from the Pali, and freely acknowledge that if it has any merit it is due to my kind friend Professor Cowell—its blemishes will be all my own.

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THE VEDABBHA JĀTAKA.

ONCE upon a time when Brahmadatta was king at Benares, a certain Brahman in a village knew a magic spell called the Vedabbha spell.[3] This charm, they say, was an invaluable and very precious one. Now at the time of the moon's conjunction with a particular lunar mansion (or asterism) he repeated this spell, and looked up to the sky, and thereupon there fell from heaven a rain of seven precious minerals. At this time the Bodhisat was being taught science[4] by this Brahman. Now one day, for some reason or other, the Brahman took the Bodhisat, and leaving his own village came to the kingdom of the Ceti. In the course of their journey is a certain wooded spot where five hundred robbers, known as the "Despatchers,"[5] rob and murder wayfarers. These men seized upon the Bodhisat and the Vedabbha Brahman. The reason why they are known as the "Despatchers" is because it is said that whenever they take two prisoners they "despatch" one of them to bring back a ransom; therefore are they called "Despatchers." For instance, when they capture a father and son, they say to the father, "Bring us a ransom, and then take your son and go your way"; and in the same manner when they take captive a mother and daughter, they let the mother go; and in the case of an elder and younger brother, they let the elder go; and in the case

[3] "The Vedabbha spell." So called from Vidarbha (the modern Berár), where Damayanti lived and loved.

[4] The phrase here used occurs also in the *Dummedha Jātaka* and elsewhere, and seems to be a Pali equivalent for φοιτᾶν εἰς διδασκάλου.

[5] "Despatchers." Perhaps the term is euphemistic. The Brahman, in the end, might well have parodied Shakspere, *Richard II.* Act IV. *sub finem:*

"Oh! good, *despatch! despatchers* are you all."

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of a master and pupil, they send away the pupil.[6] At this time, too, they keep the Vedabbha Brahman, and let the Bodhisat go. The Bodhisat, after bidding his master good-bye, went away, saying, "I will return at the end of one or two days. Do not be afraid, and be sure you obey my words. To-day will take place the lunar conjunction which causes it to rain gold; do not, from impatience to bear this trouble, repeat the spell and bring about a rain of money. Otherwise you yourself will be destroyed as well as these five hundred robbers." After this warning to his master he went off to fetch the ransom, and the robbers at sunset bound the Brahman, and made him lie down. At this very moment the full orb of the moon arose from the the eastern quarter of the heaven. The Brahman observing the lunar conjunction, and thinking to himself, "The lunar conjunction that brings a rain of money has now arrived. What have I to do with suffering affliction? I will repeat my spell, and causing it to rain money I will pay my ransom to the robbers, and then go away as I please." So he said to the robbers, "Ho, you robbers! why did you take me prisoner?" "For a ransom, sir," they answered. "If," said he, "it is money you want, quickly release me from my bonds, let me bathe my head, put on me new[7] clothes, and, anointing me with perfumes and decking me

[6] Following the analogy of the previous instances one would rather have expected the master to be released. The principle of the selection, no doubt, would be to let go the one most likely to return. A Hindu father would be most anxious to save his son's life, as his own welfare in a future world would depend upon it. Perhaps a pupil's affection would be concentrated on a single Pandit, while that of the teacher would be less strong, from being distributed amongst many pupils. I am, however, inclined to believe that the victim of some Eastern Orbilius to spite an honourable profession has tampered with the text.

[7] Literally *unbeaten*, *i.e.* unwashed. The Hindu dhobís or "washermen" beat the clothes against a stone slab to clean them. For an instance of this use of the stone see a curious passage in the *Lalita Vistara* (Bibliotheca Indica ed. p. 333). Buddha is at a loss how to wash a shroud (which he has taken as his garment) in a magic pool created for that purpose, when Sakra lets fall a *stone* from heaven and removes the difficulty. This is rather a reversal of the ordinary "Deus ex machina" process.

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with flowers, let me stand up." The robbers, on hearing what he had to say, did accordingly. The Brahman, knowing it was this particular lunar conjunction, repeated his spell looking up to the sky, and at once treasures fell down from heaven. The robbers gathered the money together, and, making a bundle of it in their upper garments, went on their way. The Brahman too followed after them. Then certain other five hundred robbers captured these ("Despatcher") robbers, and being asked by them, "Wherefore do you take us prisoners?" the captors answered, "For a ransom." "If," said they, "you want money, take this Brahman. He, by looking up to the sky, makes it rain gold. It was he that gave us this money." So these robbers, letting the "Despatcher" robbers go, took the Brahman prisoner, saying, "Give us too money." The Brahman said, "I should be glad to give you the money, but the lunar conjunction that causes it to rain gold will only take place a year's time from hence. Bear with me if you please for the present, and I will cause it to rain money then." So the robbers in a rage said, "O you wicked Brahman, you cause it to rain money for others now, but us you put off with excuses for another year;" and with these words they cut the Brahman in two with a sharp sword, and, casting his body into the road, hastily pursued after and fought with the other robbers, and killed them all. They then took the money, and again dividing into two parties fought with one another, and killed two hundred and fifty, and so on in this way slew one another until there were only two left.[8] So were a thousand men brought to destruction. But the two survivors by this means got the money, and buried it in a secret spot near

[8] I think that just as before all the five hundred were slain to a man, so here the two hundred and fifty are all killed, and so on in each case one half is always annihilated by the other. This is confirmed further on in the story by the discovery of two hundred and fifty bodies in one place. If, however, the process of subdivision were carried too far, there would soon arise the difficulty of an odd number. But perhaps, as the scene of the story is laid in Wonderland, both Cocker and the Logic of Chance may be safely disregarded.

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a certain village. And one of them took his sword and sate guarding it, while the other took some rice and went into the village to get some food cooked for them. "This covetousness verily is the root of destruction."[9] With this thought the one robber sate down near the treasure and said to himself, "When this fellow comes back, this money will have to be divided into two parts. Suppose I were to strike him with my sword as soon as he returns and kill him." So he placed his sword close by him[10] and sate down, waiting for his coming. The other robber also thought, "This money will have to be divided. Suppose I were to put some poison in the food and give it to my companion to eat, and after killing him get the money all to myself." So when the food was ready, after having himself eaten some, he put poison in the rest and took it and went back to his fellow. But just as he was still standing, after setting down the rice, the other robber cleft him in two with his sword, and, casting his body in a secret place, he also ate of the food, and himself too there came by his death. Thus was it that through this money they were all destroyed.

Howbeit, at the end of one or two days, the Bodhisat came with the ransom. And when he did not find his teacher here, while he saw some money[11] scattered about, he said, "The master has disobeyed my words, and caused it to rain money, and they must have all perished." So

[9] Perhaps the words "This covetousness," etc., might be regarded as the sentiments of the author. "It is said that this covetousness," etc. The *iti* like inverted commas merely implying that it is a quotation of some well-known proverb. I should, however, have rather expected *kira* in that case.

[10] Fausböll's text reads *sannahitvā*, a doubtful form for *sannayhitvā*, "girding on his sword." I venture to suggest a slight emendation *sannidahitvā*, which would give the meaning "placing his sword near him,"—surely a more natural thing to do under the circumstances. My first conjecture was *sannihitvā*, which is still nearer Fausböll's reading. But if this form of the gerund exists, it would seem to be a word of retiring habits. I fail to find it in Childers.

[11] I suppose, after the shower of money, some pieces had escaped the notice of the robbers.

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saying, he went along by the high road. And as he went on, he saw his master lying in the road, cut in two. "He is killed," said he, "from disobeying my words"; and gathering together logs of wood he made a pyre and burnt his master's body, and decked it with flowers of the forest. Then going further he saw five hundred dead bodies, and still further on two hundred and fifty, and so on by degrees till at last there were only two missing.[12] He thought to himself, "These nine hundred and ninety-eight men have come by their death; these other two robbers must be here too, they would not have restrained themselves more than the others,—where can they have gone?" So he went on till he saw the road by which they had gone into the thick jungle with their treasure, and proceeding along it he found a heap of money made up into a bundle, and saw the dead body of the robber who was killed, just as he spilled the dish of rice. Then seeing it all, he said, "This truly must be what these men have done; but where is the other fellow?" And looking about him he saw his body cast on one side in a secret place. And he said, "Our master disobeyed my word, and by his ill-timed speaking brought about his own ruin, and moreover caused the destruction of a thousand other men. Alas! they who seek their own advantage by wrongful and unjust means, like our teacher, bring upon themselves a very great destruction." With this thought he uttered the following verse:

"Who seketh wele by wrongful meaus
Shal derely it abye:
A Brahmin sith thes shrewes sle
For coveityse they dye."

[12] I translate *missing*, not *dead*, because it seems best to take the words "avasāne dve jane" as parenthetical, for in the quaint language of an Indian grammarian the figure called mandūka-pluti, a *frog-leap*, has been here employed. Otherwise the construction must be proleptic, as the Bodhisat clearly had not yet discovered their dead bodies. In that case a close parallel may be found in Keats's *Isabella*:

"So the two brothers and *their murdered man*
Rode past fair Florence."

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Then the Bodhisat said, "Just as our master, striving by wrong means and in the wrong place, caused it to rain money and so brought about his own ruin, and was the cause of the destruction of others also, even so, whosoever else shall strive by wrong means to further his own advantage, he ever will ruin himself, and will become the ruin of others". And, while the deities of the wood made the grove resound with their cries of approval, he taught a religious lesson by this Gāthā,[13] and thus, by (fair) means,[14] taking the money to his own house, he did alms and other religious acts, and continuing in good works so long as he lived, at the end of his days attained to the heavenly world.[15]

[13] The gāthās or verses at the end of the *Jātaka* are written in archaic style, and usually contain the pith of the story in a short compass, and bear about the same relation to the fable that a text does to a sermon. The name "Gāthā" is generally applied to a form of Sanskrit poetry, the origin of which is still, I imagine, the despair of Oriental critics. From long wrestlings with their difficulties I am bold to aver my belief that they have few (if any) *fixed* grammatical forms. In fact, as regards grammar, if compared with pure Sanskrit, they forcibly remind one of the nigger English of "Uncle Remus." Still a fair sense may be easily extracted from them, and occasional passages (possibly fragments of an earlier literature) of some poetical merit may be found embedded in a mass of prose verbiage. Nevertheless, I rejoice to think that in one respect at least they are unlike the "bore" of De Quincey, whom "Heaven, in its mysterious wisdom, suffers to propagate his species,"—unless, indeed, Sanskrit verse were to become compulsory in the Indian Languages Tripos, in which case the worst features of the Gāthās might perhaps be reproduced.

[14] *Upāyena* occurs twice in this *Jātaka*, used absolutely. I doubt if it here equals *etena upāyena*, "by this means." *By an artifice, cleverly*, would be a natural sense, but this does not agree with the context, and it seems to be used here as the opposite of *anupāyena*, "by wrong means," "unjustly," and would therefore signify in this passage *by right means, fairly*. Whether the moral of the story be by the same author as the story or not, it is clear that the whole point of the moral lies in the contrast between *upāyena* and *anupāyena*, the conduct of the Brahman and the Bodhisat being at the conclusion brought strongly into contrast, the one meeting with an untimely death and the other enjoying a long life.

[15] So Childers. Fausböll inclines to render this phrase, "He passed away, filling his place, or taking his seat in heaven."

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